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SUBJECT: OPPORTUNITY AND STABILITY IN CAP HAITIEN

1. Summary. Ambassador Foley visited Cap Haitien on April 20-21 to meet with political, religious and economic leaders, as well as U.S. citizens in the region. Optimism prevailed on security; Cap Haitien is stable and has seen no political violence in recent months. Chilean MINUSTAH forces deployed in Cap Haitien have good control of the city and excellent relations with local police. The Ambassador saw firsthand the extent to which the Haitian political system is set up to neglect provincial needs while concentrating wealth and power in Port-au-Prince. While funds and equipment for road projects, infrastructure improvements and elections are slowly being dispersed in the capital, little to no impact is being felt in Cap Haitien. Similarly, Cap Haitien's leaders are worried about the state of the Haitian National Police, who are under-equipped and small in numbers. Because security is not as grave a concern in Cap Haitien, opportunities for investment appear more promising there. End Summary.

2. On April 20, the Ambassador traveled from Port-de-Paix to Cap Haitien, where he was met by a disproportionately large delegation consisting of IGOH officials, UN CivPol HNP, UN civil affairs, and Chilean soldiers. Delegate Wilbert Joseph accompanied the Ambassador to the town of Milot, where he provided a guided tour of the ruins of the Palace of Sans Souci and the Citadel La Ferriere, two of Haiti's most impressive national monuments. Joseph was the first of many to request the establishment of an Embassy presence in Cap Haitien, either in the form of a Consular Agent, an Honorary Consul, an American institute or some regular and frequent visitation by an officer from the Embassy. The sentiment of those in Cap is that Embassy interest in the region would compel GOH interest as well. (Note: In fact, the Embassy is a frequent visitor to Haiti's second city).

3. In Milot, the Ambassador visited Radio Kayimit, one of many Haitian community radio stations that receive programming and equipment through USAID's community radio network. What seemed to be every last resident of Milot was assembled around the station to hear the live broadcast of the interview, in which the Ambassador spoke about the need to seek unity and move towards elections peacefully. Public Diplomacy then made copies of the interview for distribution throughout the community radio network. (Comment: Milot's previous mayor, Moise Jean-Charles, is reportedly still politically active in the region. A firebrand Lavalas supporter, his protesting led to the cancellation of the massive "Sailing into History" cruise last summer. While the situation in Milot and Cap Haitien appeared calm and stable, Jean-Charles casts a long shadow, and his name was on the tip of many tongues when describing security in the region. On April 25, Jean-Charles made his own radio address criticizing the Ambassador for claiming Aristide was part of the past at a press conference on April 21, and Lavalas also organized a demonstration in Cap Haitien on May 9, announcing that they will continue to call for the ousted president's return.)

4. Throughout the visit in Cap Haitien, the strong performance and professionalism of the Chilean forces and CivPol contingent were evident. Chilean Commander Tulio Rojas provided an excellent briefing, which outlined not only the MINUSTAH and HNP footprint in the North but also the presence of several armed bands operating in small towns outside Cap Haitien (septel). While Rojas did not view these bands as a threat to stability, he said that MINUSTAH nevertheless plans to bring them in or force them to disarm. Though likely motivated more by power or hunger than politics, he described these bands as "chimeres". He said that MINUSTAH had control of Cap Haitien and that no threat existed of a reemergence of armed extra-governmental forces in the city.

5. According to Rojas, no "no go" zones existed in the city, though some neighborhoods were more volatile than others, and many neighborhoods were controlled by bosses who had not yet welcomed MINUSTAH on their own turf. MINUSTAH Head of Regional Office Javier Hernandez affirmed that Lavalas partisans felt they could safely march and organize because of the UN presence. At the same time, some Lavalas leaders were still demanding the physical return of Aristide, the disarmament of ex-military, the release of all political prisoners, reparations to harmed Lavalas partisans and the punishment of human rights violators. Rojas knew of no powerful political parties other than Lavalas in Cap.

16. Similar to Port-de-Paix, Cap's leaders were concerned about the underequipped Haitian National Police. UN CivPol estimated that the HNP in the Northern department had one weapon for every three officers, with even fewer bullets. Morale in the HNP was low, their exposure to danger was high, and the public had little faith in them at present.

17. The Interim Mayor of Cap Haitien, Aspil Fleurant, a banker by trade, said he was fed up with public service and longed to return to private life. His main preoccupation was with the state of the HNP and the infrastructure in Cap. He and Ralph Dominique, the HNP Director for the Northern Department, both reiterated the need for a "minimum amount of resources" - vehicles, bullet-proof vests, uniforms (but notably not weapons).

18. Echoing his counterparts in Port-de-Paix, Fleurant stated that he feels the provinces are forgotten and neglected by the capital. If he had a grader, a front-end loader, a trash truck and a backhoe, he could greatly improve conditions in the city. He noted that American Airlines has already agreed to begin flying to Cap once the airstrip is lengthened and rehabilitated, but no money was forthcoming from Port-au-Prince for that project. The Ambassador promised to follow up on that with the IGOH. Fleurant also noted what he called a great indifference to improving life in Cap on the part of its citizenry, for which he could offer no explanation, other than to say that Haiti has not yet restored the authority of the State.

Business Leaders See Opportunity, Peace In Cap --

19. In a dinner with the Ambassador, business leaders said that the drug trade in Cap Haitien has decreased. Nick Bussenius, Amcit warden and hotel owner, said that he noticed fewer traffickers moving through Cap Haitien. Natacha Barrella, a travel agent, said that her business was down because the wives of drug traffickers are traveling less. However, the group agreed that the drug trade remained strong and that traffickers made little effort to hide their activities. Both the Chilean and CivPol commanders stated that their forces receive frigid and inhospitable reactions from workers in the port when they conduct operations there.

10. The group repeatedly returned to the theme that Cap Haitien has great development potential, but is largely ignored by the central government. As such, they were focused more on local than national elections. However, the business community in Cap Haitien planned to support a candidate in the second round of the national elections. They also agreed that Cap Haitien was significantly more secure than Port-au-Prince. All of them expressed reluctance to visit Port-au-Prince, saying that when they have to go they make their visits as short as possible. They also voiced frustration with the international community's posture towards Haiti, which fixated on insecurity in Port-au-Prince while ignoring stability in Cap, thereby discouraging investment outside the capital.

11. In this vein, they requested a stronger Embassy presence in Cap Haitien. Ultimately, they would like to see a return to permanent US representation there, but they were willing to settle for a regularly scheduled visit from the Embassy. They also requested that the Ambassador push the EU, Taiwan, and IDB on roads projects planned for the north but not yet underway, as well as the IGOH on the long-planned airport development project that has seen no action.

12. COMMENT. The same themes appeared throughout Ambassador Foley's visits to Cap Haitien and Port-de-Paix (septel). The central government and the international community ignore the provinces. The HNP has no equipment, while narcotraffickers are operating with impunity in the Northern claw. Due to the deteriorating infrastructure, the most convenient commercial option is smuggling and contraband from the United States and the Dominican Republic. Ironically, neglect from the capital appears not necessarily to be such a bad thing. The Northern coast is lush and green in many places, and appears to enjoy a better quality of life among its poorest citizens than the poor in Port-au-Prince. Cap Haitien is closer to the United States, the free trade zone in Ouanaminthe (septel) and the central plateau (Haiti's breadbasket) than Port-au-Prince. That, coupled with its relative distance from the power-dominated and violent politics of Port-au-Prince, would seem to make it an ideal target for growth and investment. Post will explore options on establishing a more regular presence in the region, as well as follow up on the various road and infrastructure projects which are currently still inactive. END COMMENT.
GRIFFITHS